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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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Oral history interview with Roy C. Aldridge  
[full name of interviewee]

about establishment of Manned Spacecraft  
[main focus of interview]

Center in Houston, Texas

<sup>1962</sup>  
Title: Chief, Administrative Services, MSC  
[interviewee's current and/or former title and affiliation]

1968 Office of Director of Administration

Interview conducted by Robert B. Merrifield, Staff Historian  
[interviewer's name/position]

at MSC  
[location of interview]

Transcript and tape(s). [for inventory only: # pages 8; # tapes 1]

*Edited by interviewer & transcriber* Master 1

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Biographical - [date/place of birth; family background] \_\_\_\_\_

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Education - \_\_\_\_\_

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Career Path - Fairchild Aircraft - Air Force Plant  
 Residency Office; <sup>1959</sup> NASA Space Task Group -  
 Purchasing Agent; 1961 Manned Spacecraft  
 Center, Houston; 1967 Support Services  
 Coordinator to Agello

Topics - <sup>evolution of</sup> Space Task Group into Manned Spacecraft Center;  
 temporary facilities; start up estimates;  
 selection of communications carrier; move to  
 permanent facilities; joint use negotiations with  
 Ellington AFB; printing and graphics  
 controls; problems: location of communications  
 center and central mail room; formation  
 of NASA Exchange and Credit Union; original +  
 replacement office furniture; initial overcrowding;  
 Cafeteria; employee recreational facilities

INTERVIEW WITH ROY C. ALDRIDGE  
October 22, 1968

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Four of us came from the Air Force Plant Residency Office at Fairchild Aircraft--Glenn Bailey, Wayne Corbett, Dan Bell, and myself--and we joined the Space Task Group about the same time. Three of us are still here. Dan Bell, who was a production specialist, worked on the tracking network directly for Sherwood Butler at Langley on the Western Electric Contract. He transferred to Goddard while the rest of us remained with the Space Task Group. On the 19th of October 1959, I moved to Langley and about ten days later was transferred to the Space Task Group. I was Purchasing Agent for the Space Task Group--the only Purchasing Agent STG had at the time. 28  
I bought the typewriters, adding machines, furniture and even food for the monkeys in the animal program at Wallops Island. I remained in the Procurement Supply Office, as it was called at that time, until June of 1961. 76-2

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About this time it was decided that STG would become the Manned Spacecraft Center be be relocated. Locations in several different parts of the country were being considered. With the change in Administration, Glennan left and Webb came in, and that's when Hjernevik, Whitbeck and Bingman joined STG. I was assigned to prepare estimates of what would be needed to run a Center with about 1700 people initially and about five thousand people eventually. I was to determine what it would take to support the Center insofar as Procurement, Supply, and Transportation were concerned. Apparently, Hjernevik and Whitbeck liked my estimates to the staffing requirements for Procurement, Supply, and Transportation because they pulled me out of Procurement and I began working directly for Bingman preparing estimates for Administrative Services and other areas. I continued on that assignment

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until Marty Byrnes was instructed to form a cadre of about 15 or 20 people to locate temporary facilities in Houston which could be used while the permanent site was built. Marty Byrnes and I came to Houston in September 1961. I was assigned as his alternate for renting the facilities, local procurement overall site activation efforts while Marty was absent. I participated in the acquisition of all our temporary rental facilities except the Franklin Apartments, and happily I was on leave when that was rented.

In those days everybody did everything. There weren't enough people to go around and we got involved in many things. Of necessity, we took some short cuts in leasing arrangements, etc., because we had hundreds of people on their way to Houston. We were running the Mercury Program, getting the Gemini and the Apollo Programs started and trying to set up the Center at the same time. By and large all the arrangements for leases that we made turned out well. Although there were a few problems, these are to be expected in a program like this.

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A fellow by the name of Guy Boswick was to be Chief of the Administrative Services Division, and he was supposed to come with us from Langley to Houston. We ran into difficulty in setting up a printing plant here, as the JCP turned us down. Whitbeck asked me to resubmit our request. I didn't know anything about printing in those days, so I got George Gray from NASA Headquarters and Harry Hamilton from Langley to help me prepare a presentation to the JCP. It was successful and granted permission to set up a printing plant.

I guess my success led Marty to ask me if I would take over the Administrative Services Division, when Boswick decided not to transfer from LRC. I agreed. Almost immediately, I got caught in a controversy over the selection

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of a communications carrier for the Center. I had recommended to Bingman at the time that he hire a competent communications specialist to take care of administrative communications, and the person selected was Tom Ullrich. Within a week after he reported to work, Tom was put on the Source Selection Panel for our Communications Carrier. The question was, should we hire Bell or General Telephone? Some of the information that Tom passed on to me involving selection criteria alarmed me and I passed it on to Bingman who alerted Hjernevik. He dissolved the earlier panel and set up a new one which was better qualified to review our communications requirements. That group recommended selection of Southwestern Bell. General Telephone protested the selection to the GAO, but our selection was sustained.

When we started building the permanent buildings, I helped set up our communications operations. I supervised the organization of the printing plant as it is today, although we lost the space that was originally allocated for it in Building 8. I drew up a sketch of how it should be designed and Jim Bayne and I worked out the drawings of the plan as it is now at Jim's house. We originally planned to have printing, microfilming and publication distribution in the same building but because of an organizational change that occurred a couple of years later, microfilming was transferred out of Administrative Services into Technical Information.

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In the move from temporary to permanent facilities I handled much of the scheduling; a move coordination team had been appointed and Rubenstein, Sherm Kendall and others served on it. Most of the support that was provided, however, came from the Administrative Services Division. Ed Johnson, who handled transportation, and I were the two that really moved the Center.

In the early days we all were worked hard--50 and 60 hours a week. Most of us in the site activation group lost our leave and never got any vacations. There just wasn't enough time to allow us to get off more than a day or so at a time. I lost about 18 or 20 days of leave the first year, and it has been somewhat like that at least until the move to the Site.

In addition to negotiating leases for the buildings we occupied downtown, Frank Hickey, Roaul Lopez and I began negotiations for joint use of Ellington with General Guske. The details of the joint tenancy agreement we worked out with the Continental Air Command have undergone practically no changes of consequences since then. I also helped work out the agreement on communications at White Sands. North American had wanted to put in a real elaborate system and Marty Byrnes suggested to Wes Messing that I be allowed to review these plans. Adam Cook and I went out to White Sands and over a period of about a month worked up an agreement with the Mountain States Telephone Company for the communications package that the White Sands Test Facility has since used. In the arrangements for communications at Ellington, the Air Force objected to us having a separate satellite operation and wanted out system combined with theirs. The Army wanted the same thing to happen at White Sands. But to do this would have meant that we would have needed two telephone books and different sets of numbers, a different switchboard, etc. So largely with Adam Cook's help we worked up the arrangements where we have a satellite operation similar to what commercial companies like Humble or Union Carbide use. Consequently, we have everything under our own control here and at White Sands. Communications people in Headquarters consider this arrangement superior to counterpart systems at Marshall or at the Cape.

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We pioneered printing controls for the Agency. The way we handle our contractor insofar as printing is concerned is now a operating standard and procedure for the entire agency. Same thing is true of Graphics. We took some Langley standards and developed thim for the use of our own people and our contractors.

After the Apollo fire all sorts of support services were needed. The program office needed a central point from which to draw support and Jack McClintock asked that I be assigned as the focal point for this. As a consequence I became the Administration Directorate Support Services Coordinator to Apollo. Since that time I have been the coordinator for all support for Apollo printing experts, security experts and so on.

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There were some things that it would have been better if we had done differently. For example, I objected to putting our communications center into Building 2. I felt that the time would come when space in Building 2 would become a premium. Much of this was decided before I got involved in Administrative Services, when the division was still under Boswick and it was too late to reverse the decision once I got involved. I also felt that it was a mistake to have the Central Mail Room in Building 2, where it clutters up the elevators and hallways with mail sacks and carts--and of all places to put it on the second floor. It should have been located in a service building somewhere else. But there wasn't any service buildings set aside for this purpose. As a result we have visitors coming to our management building, and here is the mail man trying to get in with a sack of mail that should have been sorted out somewhere else. But these are really little things when compared to the magnitude of the effort that we were involved in. One of the by-products of being located in temporary

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buildings downtown was that our people wanted soft drinks, sandwiches, etc. We didn't have a NASA Exchange for MSC, so I asked Kimble Johnson how this was done at IRC. One day Marty asked me to get some Coca-Cola machines in the Rich Building, and remembering what Kimble had told me about non-appropriated fund activities at Langley, I called the representatives of local soft drink firms together and worked out a gentlemen agreement with them. They agreed to give me a commission like they did everyone else. So I collected that commission and deposited it in our Credit Union. I collected these commissions for about two and one-half years before the NASA Exchange was set up. When it was finally set up I transferred about \$5,000 from the Credit Union to Grace Winn who was Treasurer of the Exchange. In that way we were able to set up the NASA Exchange. We have about \$150,000 for an employees' recreation facility which will be built some day. We operate the cafeteria, and vending concessions. In later years the gentlemen's agreement was superceeded with contractual agreements negotiated annually. In addition, satellite snack bars were set up in Buildings 2, 45, 30, and 419 to service the needs of people who did not want to take the time to walk to the cafeteria building.

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I wound up as the first president of the Credit Union. I was in a meeting of the newly created Exchange Council and was called to the phone. When I came back I had been elected. So I helped set up the Credit Union as well.

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When the advanced party arrived in Houston, some of its people accepted brightly-colored modernistic office furniture from a local commercial supplier. After Hjernevik arrived, he took one look at that garish assortment and tole me to get rid of "that stuff." From that point on we obtained the

gray metal or brown wood furniture from GSA that is standard throughout the Government. Needless to say, this job made me extremely unpopular with MSC employees who had become attached to their gold sofa or orange chair. Within a week after I was given this assignment, all of the commercial furniture had gone back to the supplier.

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In the first few months in Houston, there simply wasn't enough furniture to go around. There were so many people arriving every day that we were hard put to keep up with the demand. Many people also were still saddled with supervising activities back at Langley, and as a consequence had to divide their time between Houston and Hampton. While they were away their desk seldom was unoccupied. I recall that John Peterson, then in the Astronaut Office, occupied my desk whenever I was out of town.

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The MSC Exchange Council has operated the Cafeteria since it opened for business at the permanent site. Everything seemed to be running smoothly initially, but before long it was evident that the cafeteria was losing money at an alarming rate. The problem was that our cafeteria manager, although a fine fellow, was a poor businessman. I was assigned to investigate the situation, and soon discovered that the lack of a cost control program had resulted in a loss to the Exchange Council from cafeteria operations of some \$60,000. In itself, this was a serious concern, and also had wider implications, as our plans for an employee recreation facility at the Site hinged on the availability of a surplus or a profit from this source. The loss in subsequent years was trimmed to \$24,000 through economies of operation, and by the end of 1968 about \$150,000 was available in non-appropriated funds for use in development of employee recreational facilities. Expenditure of these funds still require approval

from NASA Headquarters and Congress, which we hope will soon be forthcoming so that we can start the first phase of construction.